

Section 4 Focus Group Findings

Three focus group sessions were scheduled during September 2001. The impact upon these meetings by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, resulted in low citizen turnout. In an effort to gather more citizen input, a fourth focus group session was scheduled in November 2001. The focus group sessions were held on these dates at the following locations:

- September 4 James River Community Center
- September 20 James City/Williamsburg Community Center
- September 27 James City County Library in Norge
- November 14 James City/Williamsburg Community Center

The focus group process gathered citizen comments and concerns, as well as praise for some actions taken by the County, including the FYI education publication. These meetings provided a snapshot appraisal of community understanding regarding greenways issues as well as any personal effects it would have upon individual citizens. The information gathered was essential to formulating clear and concise strategies to aid in implementing the Greenway Master Plan. Over time, these strategies will evolve to meet changing citizen needs and concerns.

Focus Groups Results

These focus group sessions lasted approximately two hours and were divided into four sections: introduction and general information concerning the greenway program and County approval process; small group discussion to gather general information on what greenways mean to citizens; large group discussion to assess goals and develop specific strategies; and map making.

The introduction and general information session provided participants with many facts and details, including an overview of the process, the chronology of events leading up to the Greenway Master Plan, the County's definition of greenways, and the reason citizens were invited to participate in the process. A seven-minute video produced by The Conservation Fund and the America's Greenway Program provided visual images of greenways to help jump start focus group discussions.

Small group discussions provided information on the way the County could approach design, location, implementation, and education to address citizen needs and concerns. In general, citizens had a comprehensive understanding of what greenways are, but they also attached intangible value characteristics to greenways such as beautiful, peaceful, meditative, bucolic, and fun. Nearly all participants had been on a greenway and liked the connectivity of walking trails between parks, schools, residential and commercial areas, and historic sites. Other localities around the country were cited for having wonderful greenway systems. There was consensus that all citizens, even wildlife, will benefit from a greenway system. Other benefits mentioned included ecotourism, commuting, connecting our community and citizens, teaching our children, and just getting outdoors away from the TV.

The challenges associated with greenways dealt with safety, security, litter, user conflicts, crime, funding, over-use, maintenance, and property acquisition. In addition, the protection of open spaces and critical environmental areas would need to be evaluated to determine whether human uses are compatible with preservation goals. When asked how they would feel about a greenway

near their home, the majority of participants supported it. Comments were wide ranging from “rather than houses,” “want it,” “already have one,” to proximity issues related to privacy and protecting personal property. Most felt the inclusion of wide buffers in these situations would resolve many negative attributes. Concerning the kinds of trails citizens would like, citizens emphasized soft surface walking and running trails, paved multiuse trails, interpretive trails, and special use trails for other recreational needs such as mountain biking, equestrian, birding, blueways, even historical trails. Citizens also requested beautiful trails to connect them to places, which also pass through a diversity of land types and vegetative covers.

Large group discussions centered on developing specific strategies for the six goal areas determined as outcomes from defining greenway benefits. Prior to developing these strategies, citizens were asked to vote for the goal they feel is most important to them. After citizens created strategies for the goals, they were given numbered dots to prioritize those strategies they felt were most important. Those strategies receiving the highest number of dots are detailed in the focus group summary section.

The final focus group exercise involved map-making, where citizens reviewed existing and proposed bikeway and greenways corridors. Citizens responded by marking locations on the maps where they would like greenway systems developed.

Goals and Strategies

At the beginning of each focus group session, citizens were provided a handout describing the vision statement, assumptions of the planning process, and the six Greenway Master Plan goals, including descriptive outlines. These six goals were developed by the Steering Committee based upon benefits associated with greenways. Participants were then asked to develop strategies and measurable ways to implement these six goals. Similar responses occurred in all focus group sessions and some were synthesized to avoid repetition. Strategies followed by an asterisk (*) indicate these strategies received the highest priority votes; (**) indicate these strategies received the highest votes by more than one focus group. The results are as follows:

1. Economic Development Goal

Address both the appropriate costs of implementing the greenway system (including land acquisition and capital improvements) and the multi-objective benefits resulting from its creation that will have a positive economic impact on the community. Examples of economic benefits are increased real property values, tourism and nature-based tourism, recreation, and special events.

Regulatory Strategies

- Have an identified greenway element in all residential and industrial development master plans that are complimentary to the JCC Greenway Master Plan. *
- Developers should construct and dedicate trails that abut their property as a requirement for development approval. **
- Require developers to proffer greenways or deed land for greenways when developing ‘new’ land. * Proffers can provide a source of funds to build trails. *
- Offer incentives to developers to donate land for greenways (i.e. density bonuses), and articulate those incentives in zoning ordinances. *

- Recognize the importance of options in use, access and presentation.
- Economic Development projects should require greenways through Comprehensive Plan changes and zoning ordinances.
- Use greenways to promote sustainable development and prevent sprawl. *

Tourism Strategies

- Provide communication materials (pamphlets, maps) about the availability of greenways to visitors so they may extend their visit and add revenue to the (tourism) market.
- Develop an Eco-tourism program, which has great business potential in Williamsburg. *
- Develop tourism packages to promote a combination of recreation/history tours.
- Develop avitourism (bird watching) programs as an example of ecotourism. We have a variety and quantity of birds that deserve recognition and programs, including conferences, etc

Implementation and Funding Strategies

- Create a special fund into which individuals and corporations can donate money for greenspace acquisition.
- Develop a nonprofit organization to ensure maintenance of the trail. Encourage corporate sponsorships of trail segments, and solicit local groups to support trail.
- Develop a sound, feasible, comprehensive funding plan for greenways. *
- Economic development can provide a source of funds to build greenways as a quality of life benefit for their employees and the entire community.

2. Recreation/Health and Wellness Goal

Design the greenway system as a recreational resource with public access connections to other recreational resources, offering a full spectrum of recreation and exercise opportunities that are safe for all users while increasing the health and wellness of our citizens.

Recreation Strategies

- Provide public access to major waterways.
- Coordinate with clubs/schools and encourage use by developing programs/events.
- Design multiuse trails; include soft surface.
- Build a variety of specific use and multiuse trails that can be used for walking, biking, running, etc. **

Health and Wellness Strategies

- Promote greenway usage to build healthier minds and bodies to increase fitness and reduce health care needs.
- Develop health and wellness programs that encourage walking as an inexpensive way to improve physical and mental health and to satisfy health goals.
- Work with School Board and education community to stress the health benefits of greenways.

Safety Strategies

- Incorporate safety, public access, and separation from traffic centers and facilities as facility design elements.
- Determine whom the trail system users are to ensure that trails are safe and secure.

3. Transportation Goal

Provide corridors that bicyclists, pedestrians, and others can use to travel safely from one place to another, free from motor vehicle conflicts, as an alternative to motor vehicle use.

Alternative Transportation Strategies

- Provide incentives for developers to encourage contributions to a trails network. *
- Provide tax credit to local employers who offer incentives to their employees who utilize greenways as transportation corridors.
- Develop maps to spotlight commercial nodes.
- Take advantage of existing utility connections and the Colonial Pipeline corridor.
- Include greenway and trail components into new and emerging transportation systems, such as Fast Rail and the MAGLEV System from ODU to Washington, DC, with trails (walking and biking) along or under the proposed systems.
- New roads and developments should be designed with a greenway component.

Non-motorized Greenway Strategies

- Identify many linkages to desired destinations, especially those used by teens and non-drivers that can be connected by greenways via non-roadway based routes.
- Provide bikes for visitors at hotels and time-shares.
- Provide bike racks so people can safely leave their bikes to walk, shop and tour the Williamsburg area.
- Develop some walking trail connections from homes to stores, etc.
- Connect as many neighborhoods as possible, and quickly.
- Work closely with the Planning Commission to ensure greenways are a top consideration in all planning decisions.

VDOT Roadway Implementation Strategies

- Pursue grant funding from Department of Transportation (VDOT).
- Initiate steps to encourage the Board of Supervisors and VDOT to include bike paths in all new road construction, planning projects, or road improvements. *
- Demonstrate how more people walking equals less asphalt, fences, parking spaces, and a slowing of demand for road widening.
- Keep asphalt to a minimum. *
- Require VDOT to build multiuse trails with all new and renovated road projects. *
- Require VDOT to build separate bike paths along all state routes. *
- Preserve shrubs and low vegetation along roads during VDOT road construction to minimize runoff and protect water resources.

4. Environmental Goal

Design a comprehensive greenway system that preserves, promotes, and enhances awareness of the County's environmental assets, including developing a plan that is sensitive to the environmental, historical, natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the Historic Triangle, and the preservation of open spaces.

Protect Natural Resources Strategies

- Preserve environmental assets including trees, special (endangered) plant communities, animal habitats, and ecosystems when designing/establishing trails. **
- Ensure adequate corridor widths to protect environmental resources. *
- Implement a countywide watershed management plan to minimize water runoff.
- Develop management plans for public use of environmentally sensitive areas.
- Coordinate with William and Mary, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and other educational institutions to research important habitats and develop living laboratories.
- Demonstrate that greenways are a less costly way to achieve clean air and water (than engineered alternatives).
- Provide multiple varieties of habitat for balanced protection (ex: open shrub land).
- Preserve and restrict access to large sensitive areas for the protection of fauna, flora, and ecosystems. *
- Design greenways and trails to be natural in character and minimize impacts to existing resources. Cut down a minimum of trees by winding trails through existing woods. Minimize damage to natural scenery rather than make walkways too large. *
- Put paths through the 60% developable land; do not infringe upon the 40% mandatory open space requirement by building bike paths on protected land.
- Maintain more open space through networks of trails and recreation areas.
- Maintain buffers and preserve trees between greenways and neighborhoods.
- Identify and incorporate sensitive and biodiverse areas into the planning and design of greenways, particularly areas identified and mapped in the natural areas inventory for the Lower Peninsula, as opposed to areas just to be connective. *
- Increase citizen's understanding of natural resources to get them personally involved in environmental projects and programs.

Preserve Historic Resources Strategies

- None.

Miscellaneous Strategies

- Identify critical greenway links with neighboring counties to establish more extensive corridors. *
- Develop Adopt-a-greenway programs for "litter" control.
- Secure developer and builder support, emphasizing it is in their long-term interest.
- Greenways must be locally connected to places of community interest.
- Develop programs so kids' groups can do studies and earn badges learning about air, insects, birds, and water.
- Expand greenways through targeted purchases, preservation trusts and easements. *
- Assess a fee on all future residential and commercial development for land and corridor purchases.
- Invite VIMS, the Native Plant Society, and the Sierra Club, etc. to assist in the design and implementation process. *

5. Education Goal

Educate the public about the need for, and benefits of, greenways and educate the greenway system user about the area's natural and cultural history. Incorporate trails into the educational learning experience for area schools as outdoor education classrooms.

Public School and Education Strategies

- Partner with schools to teach children the value of environmental protection, how to use greenways safely, and to preserve the quality of the trail experience.
- Provide interpretive trails.
- Educate all citizens to appreciate the interconnectiveness of our ecology in order to preserve and protect our environment.
- Develop a "watershed sensitivity" trail on the Powhatan Creek to educate school children about the conservation and preservation of natural resources.

News Media and Communication/Information Strategies

- Request television studio volunteers to video, then showcase, existing greenways and trails. *
- Speak to neighborhood associations and clubs.
- Undertake a continuous public relation and advertising program to educate citizens on the benefits of greenways, the desirability of this trail system, and current/future developments, via press releases, public access TV, and PSA's. *
- Create a Matoaka Lake type Nature Center in JCC.
- Showcase successful greenways in other parts of the country by bringing noted greenway experts to our community to discuss greenway planning and design. *

6. Quality of Life Goal

Design a beautiful greenway system that maximizes accessibility for greenway system users, nearby property owners, and neighborhoods to achieve a walkable, livable, and sustainable community.

Community Character Strategies

- Develop a trail system designed to connect all reaches and neighborhoods together, as well as needed services, instead of isolated segments. **
- Forge links with other groups to create broad-based community support.
- Promote the concept of greenways and bike trails to newcomers and developers. *
- Maintain the integrity of community values and lifestyles by making sure that quality of life issues are an integral part of the planning process in all planning decisions-not just those involving greenways.
- Specify purpose and designated uses such as jogging, walking, biking, skating, horseback riding... limit purpose.
- Increase public funding for greenways.
- Develop management plans to monitor safety, security, quality of cleanliness, noise, public behavior, and develop enforcement mechanisms.
- Restrict multiuse (biking) trails to power line right-of-ways, highway right-of-ways, and established public land. *
- Maintain buffers between communities and trails to provide privacy and security. *
- Set aside greenways in new developments and along new roadways.

4.1 Summary of Focus Group Meetings

Most surprising of the focus group session results were the values associated with the six goals. In what was expected to be a process weighted heavily towards recreation and environmental issues, citizens consistently rated the “Quality of Life” goal as the most important value goal. While it ranked highest in importance, it seemed to lack strategies for implementation. It may be assumed that citizens treasure the essence of this intangible community value, but struggle to provide definable, measurable, and tangible strategies to implement this goal. As one citizen remarked, *“all other goals and benefits are incorporated within this one goal.”*

The graphic below details those goals that citizens felt were most important to them. These responses should be compared to JCC Homepage Website survey data at the end of this section to recognize trends in citizen attitudes toward the six goal areas. The responses in meeting #2 and #3 reveal low citizen turnout due to the September 11 terrorist attacks, which led to scheduling meeting #4 to gather more citizen input.

Goal Summaries	#1	#2	#3	Sub-total	#4	Total
Quality of life goal	[5]	[4]	[3]	[12]	[7]	[19]
Environmental goal	[3]	[0]	[0]	[3]	[10]	[13]
Recreation goal	[3]	[0]	[1]	[4]	[2]	[6]
Transportation goal	[2]	[2]	[1]	[5]	[1]	[6]
Economic Development goal	[3]	[1]	[0]	[4]	[0]	[4]
Education goal	[0]	[0]	[1]	[1]	[0]	[1]

The graph below provides weighted values for strategies derived from citizen comments. This generalized summary indicates Environmental Strategies ranked highest among all other strategies, reflecting a concern for environmental conservation, historic preservation, and open space protection that was also reinforced by data from the JCC Internet survey. Economic Development Strategies ranked second among all strategies developed, suggesting the greenway program needs to be well supported with funding and that the positive economic impacts of greenways would be a tremendous financial benefit to the community. Transportation Strategies recognized the lack of available greenway facilities that could enable citizens to get out of their cars. Quality of Life Strategies demonstrated community consciousness to preserve the character of the community. Education strategies targeted ways to educate the community about the desirability of greenways and trails. Recreation Strategies supported the planning and development of trails within the community and articulated neighborhood concerns regarding buffers, trail surface types, privacy, security, funding, and maintenance.

Strategy Summaries	Vote Values/Number of Votes				totals	quality
	#1	#2	#3	#4		
Environmental Strategies	35/11	12/6	4/2	59/19	110/38	2.895 (1)
Economic Dev. Strategies	62/19	19/7	9/4	8/4	98/34	2.882 (2)
Transportation Strategies	25/10	22/7	10/4	18/10	75/31	2.419 (5)
Quality of Life Strategies	8/3	13/6	20/7	24/9	65/25	2.600 (4)
Education Strategies	28/10	0/0	16/5	5/2	49/17	2.882 (3)
Recreation strategies	5/3	4/2	3/2	22/8	34/15	2.267 (6)

(Note: parenthetic numbers on the right indicate strategies in order of highest value votes)

The highest-ranking strategies from the four focus group sessions are as follows:

1. Protect environmental assets that preserve trees and habitats.
2. Have a sound, feasible, comprehensive economic/funding plan in place.
3. Ensure adequate corridor width to protect environmental resources.
4. Request television studio volunteers video, then showcase, existing greenways and trails.
5. Educate JCC population to believe that this trail system is desirable.
6. Encourage all residential and industrial development projects to have an identified (proffered) greenway component in their master plans that is complimentary to the JCC Greenway Master plan. Offer incentives to developers to donate land for greenways (i.e. density bonuses) and articulate incentives on zoning.
7. Work closely with the Planning Commission to ensure greenways receive top consideration in all planning.
8. Connect all neighborhoods and needed services together.
9. Promote eco-tourism opportunities for the Greater Williamsburg area.
10. Protect large sensitive areas; ensure protection of critical plants, animals and ecosystems.
11. Build multiuse trails so that people may use them for walking, biking, running, etc.
12. Maintain buffers between communities for maintaining privacy and security.
13. Have VDOT build separate bike paths for all state routes.

Data gathered from the JCC Internet Homepage Survey.

Citizens were asked the following question and allowed one vote: What is most important to you in the development of a greenway master plan? This survey, posted on the James City County Homepage between November 1 and December 14, 2001, tallied 346 votes. Environmental goals that include preserve open space, preserve historic sites, and increase environmental protection totaled 47% of the responses. Quality of life goals that included 'all of the above' totaled 22% of the responses.

